

faith
with
grit

Also by AmyLu Riley

Stay: Why I'm Still Here, A Spiritual Memoir
Jesus as Healer: Miracles and Meditations in Luke

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for the not-yet healed

AMYLU RILEY

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*For the Spirit, who waits with us,
and for all who wait for healing*

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Preface

It was 2015. As the blustery December wind lashed my hair like tiny whips across my face, I looked into the pain in another believer's eyes.

"This is the most difficult part," he quietly confided. "It's what I probably struggle with the most." And then, even more quietly, "I know God *can* heal me, and I believe I have the *faith* to be healed, yet I am not healed."

Tears formed in his eyes, and I weighed his great sorrow. This one spiritual issue appeared to be bringing him more pain than all of his physical problems combined, and they were many.

"I know," I said. And I did. My own theology wasn't reaching the level of my pain on this very issue. I had had all the answers until it was happening to me, until I was actually living it. All my reading and studying and praying to-date hadn't produced the salve I needed. I knew the typical Bible verses and the standard church answers, and my faith in God was strong. But there remained a yawning gap I couldn't name between my beliefs and what I was actually experiencing. That chasm was filled with the very same hurt I saw mirrored in this man's eyes.

After a prayer together, he and his wife went their way, and I got into my own car to go mine. In the moments after I shut the door, I knew that this book would be written.

Introduction

Even faith a mile deep cannot touch a wound that is one inch deeper than that, let alone hope to heal it. I needed a faith that would reach to the depth of the woundedness of my spirit.

I needed to look into the eyes of someone who has waited—or even still waits—for healing, and see there not just a surviving remnant hanging on by tooth and toenail, but a faith that calmly looks into the gates of Hell and says to the enemy forces, “You have lost.” And I needed for that someone to be the person in the mirror.

One of the most difficult aspects of suffering for me to bear was my own too-thin understanding of the advent, role, and purpose of suffering in my life. Ideas and beliefs that had served me just fine when I wasn’t suffering, or had just a temporary taste of it, didn’t serve so well when the problems lasted a long time, had no foreseeable end date, went deep, seemed inexplicable, or were life-changing. When the reality of my own wait for healing crashed up against the edge of my theology—and seemed to keep colliding there—an uncomfortable blister formed. I needed a more complete, and deeper, set of beliefs about suffering—one that was true, based on the God of the Bible, of course; but also one that reached deep enough to address the level of my questions.

After years of unrelenting health problems, I was spiritually weary from living with my own theology that wasn’t covering all

of my actual experience, like a too-short blanket under which I persisted in trying to fit myself.

I had seen this same pain in the eyes and heard it in the words of other believers, as well. Maybe it has been your own experience: You believe in God. You trust him. And you may be clenching with both fists to your faith as a lifeline while you are battered by the roaring wind and waves of infirmity and all that comes with it. Maybe, over the months or years, there's also been a subtle erosion of your faith that's difficult to admit, even to yourself.

Why do prayers for healing remain unanswered? If God hasn't said *no*, as he did to Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7–9), then why hasn't he said *yes*? Why leave a daughter of Abraham bound for so long (Luke 13:16)? Why let a woman spend all she has on trying to get well, yet not be healed (Mark 5:26)? When will the day of healing come? Why not let such a person touch God's power and be healed?

I had questions, but I didn't have the answers. Those would have to come from God.

This book is based on a spiritual journey spanning a several-year period that began in 2012. Receiving what God provided as I began unpacking my questions during that time stretched my theology in ways I couldn't have imagined. There was exploration, correction, revelation, and broadening of perspective. I held conflicting ideas in tension, and worked to

understand and internalize truths revealed through the Holy Spirit, Scripture, and prayer.

Because of the exploratory nature of this story, I hope no reader will extract isolated writings—especially from the earliest part of my journey—to label them as my present position—or as God’s final word—on the subject. (I also encourage the reader to seriously consider the endnotes.) I am convinced that each of us must be diligent about our own spiritual formation. I know God isn’t finished with mine.

But as I dug into many of the spiritual questions and issues that were causing me pain, my faith became more complete. My hope is that he will do the same for you.

This process requires some real grit.

But it creates grit, too.

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1

The Problem



The Prayer Will Do *What?*

God, what happened? I thought you were going to heal me, but then you didn't do it.

I read through the simple prescription that James wrote, and I don't know where things have gone awry in my application of it:

Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. Such a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make you well. And if you have committed any sins, you will be forgiven.

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

James 5:14–16

It sounds so straightforward: Call the elders, have prayer offered in faith and anointing with oil in the name of the Lord. Then the sick person will be made well. It doesn't say *might*. It doesn't say *could*. It says *will*. Done.

Except that, over a period of several years, church elders *did* pray for me and anoint me with oil multiple times—asking for

the very healing this Scripture seemed to promise. But I still was not healed. And I had not neglected doing the rest of what James says here, either. I had believed this Scripture exactly at face value, had done what it asked of me, and was expecting what it said would happen to happen. I waited for God to bend my circumstances to fit his Word.

Why didn't the prayer and oil-anointing of church elders make me well, as this verse had seemed to clearly indicate that it would?

God, the Scripture says will, not may. But I have not been healed.

This seemingly simple text had become quite difficult and painful to live with. Where were things breaking down?

Had the prayers that I would be healed not been offered *in faith*? Besides the fact that the thought itself seemed impertinent, how could I ever really know the size of another person's faith, when I don't even know with which speck-sized seed God measures my own faith? (The mustard seed mentioned by Jesus in Mathew 17:20 *is* small, but there *are* tinier seeds.) That factor was unknowable to me; and besides, if it *were* the issue, what could I do about *that*?

It also occurred to me, however, that many faith-filled church elders could have prayed earnestly for *Job* and anointed *him* with oil, and God might still have permitted *his* suffering to continue. Wouldn't God's permission and purpose for *Job* to suffer for a time at the hand of Satan have prevailed over the earnest prayers of even the most faith-filled elders for *Job's* relief? Might not God

have still held back his own hand of mercy until the test was complete?

I know from the Scriptures that no unconfessed sin stood in the way of Job's healing—nor had anything Job had done wrong even caused his problems in the first place. He was exactly in the center of God's will and he still had *all* kinds of problems: health was one, and he suffered many other losses, as well. And even though Job did what was *right* in response, his problems were not immediately ended. There was a reason and a season for his suffering, but Job was in control of *neither*. He just had to faithfully endure until the reason was fulfilled and the season was completed, until God determined that it was time for it to end (James 5:11).

I'm not Job. I have no illusions in that direction. However, although it's tempting to think that *his* case might have proved to be an *exception* to what this James 5 Scripture seems to describe, James 5 was not even written yet in Job's time, as it is in mine.

But there was something else different about Job's time and mine. Between Job's birth date and mine, Jesus had come to earth, and he had healed people—quite a large number of people. And *that* had set the bar in a certain place when it came to my expectation for healing.

My inner being cries out, "I know you want to heal people, God! Why, otherwise, did Jesus heal everyone who was brought to him?"

The truth was, I didn't know why the James passage uses the word *will*—why it makes it sound like an absolute certainty that healing will arrive, but my healing hasn't.

God, three times James wrote it: will heal, will make you well, will be forgiven. The last one—forgiven—is easy to believe. But I can see with my own eyes that the first two—heal and make you well—do not always happen. Why not? Unless the elders are offering a prayer that is not in faith, and thereby not fulfilling the human end of this scenario, then isn't the breakdown I'm experiencing in the part where you do the healing? But why say will if it might be won't—if it's not true in every case?

If I were of a mind to make an excuse for God, I could say James was referring to the healing all believers will receive in the next life. But I do not want to recast what God *meant* in order to help the omnipotent God with his words.

The Apostle James didn't put an asterisk next to this verse with a caveat that says, “Unless your sickness is too complex or too extensive or too longstanding to be healed,” because there is no such thing. God has raised *dead* people back to life, including Jesus, whose body was tortured beyond recognition. God doesn't need an out from me on this point just because healing hasn't happened for me yet.

Rather than twisting the Scripture to make it fit only what my eyes can see—as if God needed a mulligan when his Word doesn't appear to hold up under the strain of reality—I'm just going to admit that *I don't know* why it looks like Scripture says

something that doesn't always bear out. I've learned that when I *perceive* some contradiction in Scripture—while fully knowing that the Word cannot contradict itself (2 Timothy 3:16)—it is often because my view is not yet expansive enough to see the whole truth. So I'll ask for wisdom and then hold these apparent contradictions in tension while I wait for wisdom, because I trust God more than my own understanding.

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you.
He will not rebuke you for asking.

James 1:5

God, help me understand why this word will is here in James 5 that doesn't appear to be the case, and that causes so much heartache and crisis of faith.

Wrecked Against the Rocks

O my people, trust in him at all times.
Pour out your heart to him,
for God is our refuge.

Psalm 62:8

God, I've been waiting for a healing that hasn't come, and I don't understand why it hasn't come.

Am I supposed to accept that you aren't going to heal me? That wrecks me against the rocks; it shatters my heart. But when I come back to the belief that you will heal me, then life returns to my body and I can feel the despair going out. Yet, is it a false hope? Who can answer this?

I can see that things aren't perfect here, that this isn't Heaven, that many people aren't healed; and I wonder what I am supposed to ask or believe for.

Are the miracles over? Is this the age of believing for only enough strength to get through the day? What about the big faith, like in Luke—faith that raises the dead to life? I think I could have that kind of faith, if I knew it was within your will for me to believe that way. But I have believed for those kinds of miracles and they didn't come, so is my theology all wrong?

I know my faith is in the right power—you. But I'm a little—very—unclear on the rest of it. Where did I go wrong?

The song of crickets washes over me. It soothes me in all these jangled places. A breeze dallies in the leaves. One lone cricket plays a solo, while the rest of the orchestra accompanies. A scolding bird adds its track to the mix.

These creatures don't wrestle with their theology as I do. Believing in something unseen provides me the distinct opportunity to get it completely wrong.

God gently reminds me that the Holy Spirit living in me teaches me all truth.

Then please do. I am wearing myself out on this one. Speak into me and tell me what is right about you. I will believe you.

Angel in the Water

There was a man with paralysis who had waited a long time for healing by the waters of Bethesda.

I remembered the story from years ago, when I had carried and read my grandpa's old Bible, with its peeling cover, cracked spine, and center pages coming loose.

I recalled an angel in the story who stirred the waters. Yet, *that* servant of the Lord wasn't mentioned in the translation of the Bible I now used. A closer look revealed that John 5:4, the verse with the stirring angel, had been relegated to a footnote in my newer Bible.

But I wanted that angel back in the water, stirring, healing, and doing whatever the Lord had sent the creature to do—not being shoved into an easily overlooked footnote. I searched other Bible translations and found the angel in several.

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me."

Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.

And that day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed."

He answered them, “He who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your bed and walk.’”

Then they asked him, “Who is the Man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’” But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, “See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.”

The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

John 5:1–15 (NKJV)

The footnoted angel may have seemed like a small matter, but it served as a microcosm of the larger issue I faced. I needed the *whole* truth—all of whatever God said was true.

My circumstances had outgrown my theology. Arms of my life poked out of the too-short sleeves of my faith. And so my resolve was firm: My theology would need to expand in depth and breadth—the whole truth—until my real life fit into it.

I believe in the inerrant Word of God, as originally written. I believe that the Holy Spirit is sent to teach us and guide us into truth. And I knew I was about to get some dirt under my fingernails, figuratively speaking, on this part of the journey. Lessons like this one are rarely learned in a sterile academic setting. But I needed to get on with it. I was hurting, and I knew others were, too.

Jesus, keep my eyes on you, the author and perfecter of my faith. Holy Spirit, teach me what is true—all truth, as Jesus promised in John 16:13. Father God, keep my feet off the paths of deception. Guard me, as a sheep from wolves.

Holding On

There are things that I know to be true—such as *Christ has “overcome the world”* (John 16:33) and “*God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them*” (Romans 8:28)—that, while they are true and are even lifelines, don’t reach around my pain. They raise more questions.

And, while I cling to those truths as to a flotation device, I need to find something more substantial to cling to for the ocean I face.

In case that sounds like heresy, let me explain.

There are many ways to hold on to God while the waves crash. Having only these things I have—even though I know they are true—feels like I’m holding on to the ends of his hair, when I *know* there is a way to get my arms around his chest and have his arms encircling me. But I will have to search for it. I will have to dig into the mountain of truth beneath the easily visible peaks of popular Scripture verses.

Why do I have to? Some people live their entire lives and die not knowing.

I am not willing to do that. This is the desire of my heart (Psalm 37:4), and I will not let go until God gives it to me. While I live with unanswered prayers for healing, I need his strong arms around me.

7

God Can, But Will He?



An Asterisk in My Prayer

God, I have wanted healing, and I have asked, and I have believed you for it. And because I had faith that you would heal, and I asked you to, for a long time I believed that you would heal me.

But you still have not. And now I'm wondering if you ever will.

I have begun putting an asterisk next to my own request for healing, because it hasn't come. I began telling myself that it must not be your will to heal me—that you don't want to heal me because you desire to bring some complex good out of my not being healed. But I don't know that that's really true. You haven't told me that. Did I just begin to give up? Has my hope been so eroded by passage of time without healing that I stopped believing for my own healing?

Break me free from hopelessness. I battle it; I cry out to you; I ask you to fight for me. Put my hope back where it belongs, fully in you.

Deep down, I still believe that you want to heal me. I reason that just because you can use brokenness in my life doesn't mean you prefer

that way. I just can't stretch my embrace around my not being healed and find a place to live with it. Is that because I am not supposed to cozy up to not being healed?

If you don't want to hold back my healing, then keep me free from the bondage of believing a story about you or about me that is not the true one. I have no desire to invent fictional theology to protect your reputation in my own eyes, but I do need the truth. Don't allow me to stand down from praying in faith for my own healing and from believing I will be healed, unless that's really what you want me to do. Don't let me be deceived—on the cusp of a miracle—into giving up.

He Is Able

It is so clear from the account of Jesus's healing ministry that *whatever* is wrong with *any* human *can* be fixed. My case would appear to be *so easy* for him, compared to some of those in Scripture.

And Scripture itself blatantly reminds me of his ability:

“... help us, if you can.”

“What do you mean, ‘If I can?’” Jesus asked. “Anything is possible if a person believes.

Mark 9:22-23

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

Ephesians 3:20

Can is not the issue.

So, what is?

Which Kind of Faith Do I Need: ‘God Can’ or ‘God Will’?

... Jesus asked them, “Do you believe I can make you see?”

“Yes, Lord,” they told him, “we do.”

Then he touched their eyes and said, “Because of your faith, it will happen.”

Matthew 9:28–29

Jesus said their faith was the catalyst for their healing, but he had asked if they believed he *could*—not if they believed he *would*.

So, do I only need to believe that Jesus *can* heal, without the need to take a position on whether or not I believe it’s his *will* to heal me? Or do I need to believe that it *is definitely his will* to heal me and that he definitely *will* heal me? Believing God *can* heal me is not the same as believing that he *will*.

When Jesus commended the faith of a centurion who expressed confidence that Jesus could heal his paralyzed servant from a distance with just a word (Matthew 8:10), and Jesus healed the servant, which faith was that?

“... Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed.”

Matthew 8:8

“Because you believed, it has happened.”

Matthew 8:13

At this point in their discussion, the faith being expressed was in *how* Jesus could accomplish the healing (over a distance, by

verbal command) that he had already *said* he would do. Jesus had already told the man that he would come to his home and heal his servant (Matthew 8:7). God's will had already been expressed.

But he hasn't said any such thing to me. He hasn't said he will heal me.

According to Mark 11:22–25, the keys to moving a mountain are faith in God and *really believing*—*with no doubt*—*that the thing will happen*:

Then Jesus said to the disciples, "Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, you can say to this mountain, 'May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and it will happen. But you must really believe it will happen and have no doubt in your heart. I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you've received it, it will be yours. But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too."

Mark 11:22–25

This verse is not describing the belief that something *can* happen; this is talking about believing that it *will*. So, how do I correctly apply the mountain-moving faith described in Mark 11 to my situation, when I don't *know* God's specific will for me? How could I ask for healing *without doubt that it will happen*, if there's even a *chance* it might not be God's will to heal me? The only way I *could* have a complete absence of doubt that God *will* heal me would be to know that it is his will to heal me.¹

I can keep faith for something if it is *promised* by God, or if I *know it is God's will*. Even if the thing appeared impossible, there are biblical examples all over the place of impossible-looking

promises that were kept by God, and of amazing things God did because he *wanted* to. Something's *looking impossible* is no obstacle to God.

Yet, how can I be sure it is his will to heal *me*, when I am still trying to understand whether Scripture gives that assurance, when I have no word of individual revelation from God, and when I can see his *reasons* for *not healing* in other cases—as with Lazarus and Paul? In light of that, is it unwise to continue to insist on requesting my own physical healing? Is there a possibility that I could be putting the needs of my body ahead of God's kingdom?

And what do I do with the teaching of John that when we are living guilt-free and in pleasing obedience to God, we will receive *whatever we ask* of God?

Dear friends, if we don't feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him.

1 John 3:21–22

These verses from Mark and 1 John describe a person who is fully operating as God's *agent*. The key to meeting most of the conditions they list is for me to be aligned closely enough with God to *know* that what I am asking for is what God wants!

Holy Spirit, guide me into that position (John 16:13).

Is He Willing?

Is the James 5 passage a promise that has gotten obscured? Has God *promised* healing in this life? To *everyone* who carries out the instructions of James 5:15-16? To *me*?

Or, even if there's not a *promise*, is healing what God *wants* to do in most cases?

Scripture sounds very much to me like God *does* want to heal people.

In the Bible, a person with leprosy said to Jesus, "... if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean" (Luke 5:12). And Jesus immediately responded that he was willing and healed the man (Luke 5:13).

There was also the woman who touched Jesus's clothes to be healed (Mark 5:24-34). Scripture records her thoughts: "If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed" (Matthew 9:21). Jesus had not approached *her* or *expressed* his will that *she as a specific individual* be healed. She came and took a healing, before he was even aware of it, that she *assumed* his power would confer. *And it did*. And what did Jesus have to say about it? He was pleased. He *commended* her for making that assumption and taking that action: "Your faith has made you well" (Luke 8:48).

Do these specific Scriptural examinations of God's will to heal—along with the *thousands* of other healings worked by Jesus that are recorded in the New Testament, *plus* Jesus's words in John 14:12-14 *and* the giving of spiritual gifts of healing to the

church as described in 1 Corinthians 12:28—indicate that it is God's will to heal? To heal me?

God, are you always willing to heal? Or is your willingness selective? It doesn't seem selective in the New Testament. There I see multiple instances of Jesus healing all who came to him for healing. So, if you are willing to heal me, then why not do it?

Are there times that it is not your will to heal? What if not healing is, somehow, your will for me? What if I—unhealed—am in exactly the right place for the purposes of the kingdom?

Or is the very idea that sometimes it isn't your will to heal an error? Is it nothing but a false loophole created to try to smooth things over theologically when healing hasn't come? Or, worse: Is it an outright lie—one that I've believed?

Is God's Will Not Being Done?

God, is it always your will to heal, but the breakdown is that your will is not always done on earth?

That does seem consistent with the delayed healing case recounted in Matthew 17:16-18 and Mark 9:14-29. God wanted to heal that boy (and Jesus *did* heal him shortly after the disciples failed to), but God's will was *not* done through the disciples when they attempted to heal him.

Jesus's Matthew 6:10 teaching to *pray for God's will to be done* also supports the idea that God's will is *not* always done on earth. After all, why would we need to even pray for something that

was just going to automatically always happen *without* our prayers?

God, *although you have put everything under Christ, “now we do not yet see all things put under him” (Hebrews 2:8 NKJV). So could it be your will for me to be healed, and your will just hasn’t been done yet?*

A Tale of Two Requests for Healing

Were the cases of Hezekiah and Paul—one healed, one not—*both* examples of God’s will *not* being done?

God had sent a prophet to announce it: Hezekiah’s illness would end in death. But after Hezekiah heard the news and petitioned God with bitter tears for healing, the prophet came back with different news: God would instead heal the king (2 Kings 20; Isaiah 38:1–39:1; 2 Chronicles 31:24–26).

But when God provided an amazing sign *and* healed Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:8–11; Isaiah 38:8), he did more than answer one prayer and heal one person: he provided King Hezekiah with a stunning personal testimony of the power of God. God had dressed the world stage and provided a script with which Hezekiah could declare the greatness of God to another nation, Babylon.

Soon thereafter, as if right on cue, the son of the king of Babylon and his envoy arrived, wanting to hear the amazing story of how the sun’s movement and Hezekiah’s fatal sickness had both been reversed (2 Kings 20:12).

It was a test from God, but it was one that Hezekiah failed royally (2 Chronicles 32:31; 2 Kings 20). Instead of recounting the

story of God's greatness and power, Hezekiah fell to pride, and made a show to his visitors of his *own* greatness and power (2 Kings 20:12–13; Isaiah 39:2).

When I look at that part of the account—in which Hezekiah was given such a *unique* opportunity to recount God's greatness to a pagan nation—I realize that this story was so much larger than a deadly boil and a prayer and a healing. Through a healing—given *because of* prayer—God desired to accomplish something that was larger than one person or even one nation. Hezekiah had gotten what *he* wanted, but God had not.

Fast-forward now to Paul.

Would God have *preferred* to heal Paul of his thorn in the flesh, and it really *was* God's *will* to do so, yet God knew that Paul *without* the thorn *would* have fallen to pride, at great loss to Paul and to the kingdom of God (2 Corinthians 12:1–9)? Did the importance of preventing that loss to Paul and to the kingdom *supersede* God's desire to remove Paul's thorn?

It seems possible.

In fact, Paul's retelling of the conversation between him and God about the thorn could almost read less as Paul's acceptance of a divine *will* or *mandate* that he *not* be healed, and more as if Paul took God's *recommendation* to *keep* the thorn because the stakes were so high and Paul understood that he wouldn't win his battle with pride *without* the thorn. (God apparently had given Paul similarly complex choices before (Acts 21:4, 11–14; Philippians 1:22–24).)

Yet, if Paul *had* persisted in asking—even given the facts of the case—God might have *removed* the thorn for Paul, just as God had earlier healed Hezekiah. *And Paul might have been well aware of that.*

Whether the choice to not be relieved of the thorn was actually left to Paul or not, the fact was that the thorn was not removed. However, Paul received an assurance of something important, and it's something I've been concerned about for my own life.

Will God's Will Be Done In My Life, Anyway?

At first I assumed that I needed to find the way out of my unhealed life and into health in order to live the life for which God made me—that I must be *healed* in order to fulfill my role in God's kingdom.

But then something slowly soaked in from Paul's story.

Whether Paul's thorn was God's will or not, it was what was happening. And God assured Paul that his thorn in the flesh, left in place, *would be made to serve God's kingdom*—not only for pride prevention in the apostle's life, but for making God's power complete in him (2 Corinthians 12:9). Once Paul was assured by God that his own healing was *not* a requirement for the success of Paul's lifework, Paul pressed on, unhealed (Philippians 1:21–26; 3:14). There was *more* to Paul's life—and to his participation in the kingdom of God—than whether or not he was free from this singular torment. Paul knew that, because he had asked God and been answered.

God, even if it's your will to heal me and your will isn't being done, will you accomplish your purpose for me another way—even if infirmity is left in the picture against your will?

Since your gifts and call can't be taken from me (Romans 11:29), will you both give—and ensure I keep—anything truly vital to my accomplishing your will for my life? Can I, likewise, be assured that what you do not give me—or what you permit to be taken—is not essential to my fulfillment of your purpose for me?—That my not being healed can't thwart your plan for my life?

I would find the answer in Scripture: Even when God's will is not done, his purposes stand (Job 42:2; Psalm 57:2; Psalm 138:8; Proverbs 19:21; Isaiah 46:10-11; Romans 8:28; Romans 11:29; 2 Timothy 1:9).

What Do I Pray While I Wait for Answers?

God *knows* I don't know what he wants me to pray for. So in the meantime, while I wait to know his will, what do I pray regarding my own healing?

Scripture describes the solution that has already been provided.

And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will.

Romans 8:26–27

I *don't* automatically come to God pre-aligned to his will, or even knowing what it is. So, although prayer is more than this, prayer *includes* the aligning of my heart to God's. It is a forum for the Spirit of God to reveal and purify my motives. And it is an opportunity for God to show me new things. So even when I am not yet sure what God wants, I *need* to pray: not to take a position before I'm sure of one, but because of what *God* does when I pray, both in me and outside me.

God, so many ideas would like to frame and shape my thinking. Please smack down the wrong ones like flies. The answer I need is the one that you say is true.

He asks me to place my hope in him, to pray for *his will to be done*, and then to believe that he can and will do what is best for the kingdom. So I do.

God, I want to be healed. I need you and I throw myself on your mercy to heal and restore my body. You are the only one who can. But I need to ask you to do what is really best for your kingdom. I need to trust that you are in control of this. So, I do. I cast my cares on you. I will trust you.

If tomorrow I awake healed, without limitations, I will know that it was you who healed me. I will praise you for healing me, and ask you what you want me to do, because I wouldn't want to waste a day of that life.

But if tomorrow I awake and am not healed, I will praise you anyway and ask you what you want me to do, because I also wouldn't want to waste a day of that life.

Define the parameters of my life and guide my activity. Forbid any limitations that would inhibit—and any circumstance that would distract me from—what you have set out for me to do. It is not acceptable to me to not accomplish your purpose for my life, for any reason.

I ask for your will to be done, and for you to help me trust you. Help me to be joyful, fix my eyes on you, stay near you, and do something today that will bring you a smile.

And in the space of a prayer, in the shift of my heart toward *thy kingdom come, thy will be done*, a new freedom came to my yet-unhealed life. Suddenly, Jesus's example prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) seemed much less like a general outline, and more like the best, strongest, most specific and direct prayer I could ever pray. God had thrown open my understanding that I really *did* want his will to be done—whatever that was—and that I could *ask* for it in faith even before I knew what it was.

God had never told me that he wanted me to stop asking for healing or that he wasn't going to heal me. That issue wasn't closed. But he *had* moved my eyes and my heart from drawing strength from circumstances that can change in an instant, to drawing my strength from him—the God who loves me and never changes.

8

Not Giving Up



My Big Ball of Problems

God, even when healing didn't come for Paul, he apparently only had to ask once before you gave him a response (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

But you haven't told me no or given any explanation, either.

Sometimes I don't ask for healing of smaller health problems, or for other things, because I haven't received some of the big healings I've asked you for. I realize I have come to think of the lesser things as just part of my big ball of problems that you haven't solved for me. I realize now that gradually, over time, I've stopped asking you for many things, because I've subconsciously categorized them as just part of the expanding snowball of issues you haven't put a stop to as it hurtled downhill.

Persistence, Faith, and a Hope Deferred

Instead of great expectations, has not being healed reduced me to no expectations for anything?

One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up. "There was a judge in a certain city," he said,

“who neither feared God nor cared about people. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, ‘Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.’ The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, ‘I don’t fear God or care about people, but this woman is driving me crazy. I’m going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!’”

Then the Lord said, “Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don’t you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?”

Luke 18:1–8

The story is supposed to teach persistence—that I should pray and not “lose heart” (Luke 18:1 NKJV). In Jesus’s explanation of the parable, he speaks of the elect who cry out to God “day and night.”

For a long time, I wondered why Jesus made this statement at the end of his parable about persistence in prayer: “But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?” (Luke 18:8). It seemed as if the question didn’t belong there—as if he had just tacked it on. What did *that* have to do with praying and not giving up?

But now I realize that it’s not unrelated at all. It takes *faith* in God to continue to cry out to God day and night—to persevere in prayer, especially when you don’t see the answers to those prayers in the visible realm. To “Never stop praying,” as Paul said to the Thessalonians, requires *great* faith (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Jesus was indicating that it was possible—even probable—that that kind of faith could dwindle on the earth, to the point of not being found.

Sometimes it feels like—in the part of earth I inhabit, anyway—that that may have nearly already happened. I say that because the Bible reveals how unbelief affects not only individuals and our loved ones, but an entire generation (Matthew 17:17; Luke 9:41).

There was a certain place, I recall, where Jesus healed only a few people, because people in a town did not honor him or believe in him (Matthew 13:57–58). God, is your power limited here now because too few people honor you?

What if my healing is delayed because of collective unbelief? And, in the same way, my own unbelief may be depriving others of their healings?

Although I can't know for sure how much of a factor this is in my case or in *any* particular case of delayed or blocked healing—I must take this factor seriously. I realize the urgent need to grow my own faith and to do my part in building the faith of others.

Ironically, I think I had *less* faith for the healing of others before I needed my own healing. And now my faith-anemic metaphorical chickens may be coming home to roost.

Just as a too-slim supply of faith on earth may not be a sufficient conduit for divine healing, is that same skimpy inventory of hope in God also the reason (or one of the reasons) that so much suffering is permitted by God?—To serve as a

catalyst among those who suffer to strengthen our own faith, and provide the avenue for us to bolster the faith of others?

My Persistent Prayer

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

Ephesians 6:18

Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying.

Romans 12:12

Healed or not-yet healed, I must never stop *praying*.

God, even if it just hasn't been your timing to heal me before now, that doesn't mean that my not being healed should continue for my whole life, for many more years, or even for a minute longer.

I ask you again for my healing.

I don't know how long Job suffered (and I am not Job, nor have I suffered to the extent of his losses), but I suspect that even his iconic suffering did not continue this long.¹ Scripture doesn't say.

To paraphrase Luke 13:16, should not this woman (in this case, I) whom Satan has kept bound for so many long years be set free on the day that is called today from what bound me? The woman in that Scripture, a daughter of Abraham—a believer—had been physically bent over by a spirit for 18 years before you healed her. Yet, even after such a long time, and from a condition that likely seemed irreversible to her, you healed her.

Not Giving Up

I have been under attack for a long time. I am “not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

Set me free from ensnarement and infirmity. Make me run in your paths. Free me now for the calling you have placed on my life as a daughter of the Most High God.

I believe that you are going to help me. I don’t know what that looks like, but whatever it is, it feels like long past time. Oh, Lord, hear and act. Amaze me at what you will do. Oh, Lord, do not delay. Your kingdom and your people bear your name, as Daniel said (Daniel 9:1, author’s paraphrase), and I am one of them.

Give me the faith to not lose hope in you, or diminish my hope, or turn my hope into some safe, tame creature. Make my hope in you powerful and wild—feared by the Enemy because of its sharp fangs and claws. I am done with polite hope. I choose radical hope in you, hope that shakes the gates of Hell and tears down strongholds and rips off shackles.

End of Sample

Faith with Grit for the Not-Yet Healed
is available on Amazon.com.

About AmyLu Riley



AmyLu Riley is a writer whose love of the Bible has, for many years, spilled over into stacks of notebooks filled with her reflections on Scripture. She lives in Indiana with her husband.

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